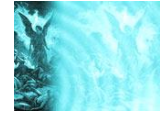




Angels and the Spiritual World

Leaders Notes – Short guide



Introduction

We live in an age where there is a great deal of interest in angels and the supernatural. There are many stories and TV shows with a supernatural theme as well as shops selling guardian angel 'charms'. It is very popular in the New Age movement.

Modern day stories about angels are not hard to find. You may have some favourites of your own. Some of ours are in the detailed leaders notes.

Most religions recognize the existence of a spiritual world. Christians, Jews and Muslims believe in angels, and mythology from many cultures includes gods, half-gods, spirits, demons, and similar beings.

What does the Bible teach about them?

When were the angels created?

We don't know exactly. It could have been before or during the creation of the heavens and the earth. It was definitely before the creation of mankind.

Creation & existence of angels

Colossians 1:16 Christ ... made the things we can see and the things we can't see - such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. NLT

See also Ephesians 1:21 & Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 3:10

How many are there?

Millions! John from the New Testament saw some in a vision and said "the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands." (Revelation 5:11 Young's' Literal Translation)

Who and What are they?

Angels have names but the Bible only tells us the names of two of them

- Michael (Daniel 10:13; Jude 9)
- Gabriel (Daniel 8 & 9; Luke 1)

Angels are

- Immortal spiritual beings
- Intelligent beings: They have more knowledge than men.
- Emotional beings: We know that they rejoice when someone becomes a Christian.
- Self-willed beings: They have the ability and freedom to make choices. We know that some of them rebelled against God.

The Status of angels

Jesus created them and rules over them.

Now Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God's right side ruling over angels, authorities, and powers. 1 Peter 3:22 NCV

Hebrews chapters 1 & 2 talks about Jesus being greater than angels although for a time he was given a place lower than them alongside us

There are different ranks or types of angels. The most important appear to be the cherubim. Michael is an archangel. Jude 9

Some Christians believe that Gabriel and Raphael are also archangels.

The Bible also mentions 'thrones, domains, principalities and powers' but it does not explain them.

What do angels look like?

- As spiritual beings, they can be visible or invisible.
- They can appear in the form of men even though they are not men.
- Both cherubim and seraphim are very different to our usual image of angels. Seraphim have 6 wings for example. There are some spectacular descriptions of both of these types of angel in Ezekiel 10 and Isaiah 6:2-7
- They are very beautiful. This can include the devil and his demons, who do not have horns or tails! That image belongs to medieval art!

What can they do?

Even though angels do not have a physical body, they can move solid objects such as when they rolled away the huge stone in front of Jesus' grave. God sometimes sends them to protect people. Many 'ghost' stories are due to the activities of fallen angels. These are the ones behind activities such as levitation and Ouija boards. A friend of mine once saw his wine decanter appear to throw itself across his lounge, the day after someone with a serious alcohol problem had visited.

Angels can only be in one place at a time, but many of them can occupy a small space. We know this from the story of the man named 'Legion' (Mark 5:9) who was healed by Jesus. A group of scholars centuries ago, once wasted a lot of time discussing how many angels you could fit onto a pinhead!

Angels cannot hear people's thoughts. Only God can do that. They do not respond to prayers, unless God himself sends them to help us, so we need to pray to Him, not them.

Angels don't marry or reproduce. They were all made at once. The cute baby angels that appear on Christmas cards, known as cherubs, don't exist as such. Cherubim¹ are in fact fearsome warrior angels. Some of them were left to guard the tree of life in the Garden of Eden.

¹ plural of cherub

They can perform miraculous signs up to a point. Revelation 16:14 refers to 'spirits of demons performing miraculous signs' NIV. This may explain how Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform some miracles in Exodus 7. The Bible warns us to be careful because the fallen angels are good at pretending to be friends when they are actually out to deceive us.

What is their role?

Hebrews 1:14 NCV. All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help.

- The word translated as 'angel' often simply means 'messenger' although they are also described as 'mighty' and people who knowingly saw one were often frightened at first, to the extent that they have to be comforted

Luke 1:8-20, 26-38: The angel Gabriel delivered messages to Zechariah and Mary.

- They surround God's throne forming a heavenly court.

Isaiah 6... I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. ² Attending him were mighty seraphim...

- They praise God.

Psalms 103:20 Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Also Luke 2:13-14 ; Revelation 5:11

- They are guardians & helpers of men

Psalms 91:9-11 If you make the Most High your dwelling, he will command his angels to guard you in all your ways.

Psalms 34:7 NLT – For the angel of the Lord is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear him.

1 Kings 19:1-8 an angel helped Elijah by giving him food

Matthew 18:10. Be careful. Don't think these little children are worth nothing. I tell you that they have angels in heaven who are always with my Father in heaven.

- They are spiritual warriors and fight battles.

Daniel 10, especially verses 10-14

I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, (chief princes NIV) came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia.
NLT

Genesis 3:24 NIV. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Does everyone have a guardian angel?

There are different Christian views on this. Catholics teach that everyone does have a guardian angel. Other Christians would say that the Bible is not clear on this although they do believe that God often sends angels to help when needed.

Can we pray to angels?

The Bible clearly teaches that we should not pray to angels but to God only. He may send an angel to help us at times but our prayers should be directed to God through Jesus

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”
1 Timothy 2:5 NIV

Likewise, we should not worship angels. Revelation 9:10; Colossians 2:18

‘The Angel of the Lord’

There are many references to angels in the Bible. In the Old Testament the phrase ‘**the Angel of the Lord**’ is often a way of talking about visits that Jesus made to Earth before he arrived as a human. It can be difficult to tell the difference between one of these visitations and a visit by an angel.

Bible stories include:

- Genesis 19 – angels rescued Lot
- 1 Kings 19:1-8 – an angel helped Elijah
- Luke 1:8-20 – Gabriel delivered a message to Zechariah
- Luke 1:26-38 – Gabriel delivered a message to Mary
- Luke 2:13-14 – angels visit the shepherds when Jesus was born
- Matthew 4:11 angels served Jesus after he had been tempted by the devil
- Luke 22:39-43 – an angel strengthened Jesus in Gethsemane
- Matthew 28:2-7 – angels rolled away the stone from Jesus’ tomb
- Acts 10: 1-5 – Cornelius had a vision of an angel when he was praying
- Acts 12 – an angel rescued Peter from prison

Other Reading

Many books have been written on angels. It is possible to become too interested in stories about them. We should focus on Jesus. For a thorough academic look at this subject, see

Systematic Theology: Wayne Grudem

Systematic Theology: Louis Berkhof

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